

and Elena, taught me to work hard and respect others. I am married to a wonderful wife, Maria Elena, who has stood with me through the peaks and valleys of the last 25 years. We are the parents of a phenomenal son, Nicolas Miguel, who has brought us joy we never knew possible and has taught us the true meaning of love. In addition, though my roots are humble, I have had the privilege of working in this Chamber. Few people get the privilege to serve here.

Yet Congress isn't what it once was. Agreements are few, partisan rancor is common, statesmanship is rare. Who are the giants of history among us? Where are the statesmen and -women who accomplished historic feats through significant signature legislative achievements?

But we know that progress is still possible. We saw this session that when Congress puts party labels aside and gets to work, like we did on VA reform, we can accomplish some great things for the American people. But those occasions were far too rare.

More often, this Chamber saw bickering and pettiness, and this Congress made history as the least productive and most unpopular Congress in the history of this proud Nation. The American people responded by making history of their own. On election day, a record number of them simply threw up their hands, wondered what is the point, and didn't go to the polls.

It is easy to see why Americans are so tired of politics, to understand why many of us don't check in on election day; when our democracy needs us the most, we check out.

Polarization, discontent, dissatisfaction, disappointment, dismay—all now normal in the course of our public discourse. Old-fashioned values like truth and good manners and respect for others' views and appreciation are no longer in vogue. Candidates and officeholders and super-PACs are shrill and mean—and yes, for some, the word would be even un-Christian—to one another.

Politicians distort truth and attempt to stampede people with fear, and many times our fears or our lack of faith win out. We fail to realize how really truly lucky we are as Americans.

Before chiding people for not meeting their civic responsibilities, Congress as a body should reflect on whether it has been meeting its own responsibility because even Congress complains about Congress, yet it does nothing to change. Most Americans are somewhere in the middle, but that is not where Congress is. In our current system, super-PACs attack those Members who stake out middle grounds.

The American people deserve better than they are getting. Our country deserves better. Our future and our children's future is too important. Both Congress and our country must rise to the occasion and confront and conquer our own internal paralysis. Patriotism must trump partisanship.

A robust democracy requires active participation. Congress—indeed, America—needs all of us. It needs Democrats and Republicans and Libertarians and Latinos and Anglos and African Americans and Asians—Americans all.

Soon I will have the highest title that any American can have—not the title of an elected official, but the title of citizen. And as a citizen, I hope to continue to remind Congress of the importance of governing well and our fellow Americans of the importance of participating in our electoral system.

I have faith that ours is a resilient Nation blessed by God. Despite our frustrations and our fears and our failings, despite ourselves, we still live in the greatest Nation the world has ever known.

Sure, times are tough, but they were tougher for our parents and our grandparents. If you think back a moment and you compare your life to theirs, you can see how far you and all of us have come.

The job now is not to be mad about and continually relive the old battles of the past nor to be afraid of the future, but to look forward and to build our future together.

I leave this institution with no regrets and many accomplishments for the people of home, particularly grateful for the opportunity to work with and serve our veterans and our Active Duty military and amazed at the incredible and still untapped potential of our amazing democracy.

I want to say thank you to each of my employees and thank you again to all the people of the 23rd District of Texas, especially to those I have had the privilege of representing since I first became a State legislator in 1991.

I wish my successor well, and I offer my prayers for all the Members of the 114th Congress. You are capable of doing great things for America when you remember to put people and policy ahead of partisanship and politics.

May God bless Texas, and may God bless the United States of America.

PROUDLY RESTORING OFFICERS OF PRIOR ENLISTMENT RETIREMENT ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss the Proudly Restoring Officers of Prior Enlistment Retirement, or PROPER, Act legislation that I will be introducing this week that will support America's involuntarily separated servicemembers.

For the first time since the 1990s, the Army is shrinking. As our military continues to draw down in the Middle East, all service branches have been tasked with making difficult force reduction decisions.

Our All-Volunteer service has made considerable sacrifices, valiantly fight-

ing two concurrent wars while solely remaining dedicated to the mission at hand.

As the Pentagon continues to implement a drawdown policy, provisions in the law could create unwarranted and unnecessary reductions to military retirement pay for thousands of involuntarily separated servicemembers.

Mr. Speaker, these men and women have honorably served our country and deserve better. For example, some prior enlisted soldiers who received a commission into the officer corps are now facing a difficult situation. Years after being commissioned, the Army has made the determination to relieve these experienced soldiers from military service.

To make the situation worse, many of these individuals do not have the required time in the officer corps and are forced to receive a lesser retirement pension. Mr. Speaker, after having earned an officer's rank, these soldiers have been reduced in rank for retirement purposes.

Mr. Speaker, our soldiers have honorably served our country and deserve better. These men and women deserve to collect full pension and benefits equivalent to their service in uniform and not subjected to an arbitrary reduction in rank and pay after being involuntarily separated from the military.

To prevent this injustice, I will soon be introducing the Proudly Restoring Officers of Prior Enlistment Retirement, or PROPER, Act. The PROPER Act does not prevent further troop reduction. It merely assures these soldiers and those affected, through each military branch, can be made financially whole with due respect for their service.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. GUTIÉRREZ) for 5 minutes.

Mr. GUTIÉRREZ. Mr. Speaker, as The New York Times said in an editorial last week, there is an immigration crisis looming next year, but it has nothing to do with the border. Rather, it is the huge effort that will be needed to fulfill the President's executive actions and get millions—millions—of American families out of harm's way by protecting them from deportation and destruction.

Sure, we are celebrating the series of executive actions taken by the President, but we are also rolling up our sleeves and getting to work. So I want to talk just a little bit about what we are doing in the city of Chicago and what I am hoping my colleagues here in Congress and my colleagues across the country in community-based organizations, the legal community, and immigrant and Latino neighborhoods in every State will do to help with getting people ready to sign up when the window to submit applications opens in 180 days and the government's review of cases begins.

This coming Saturday, the 13th, at 9:30 in the morning I will be at Rebano Church on the north side of Chicago, and more than 500 families have already preregistered for an orientation. We will go over what the President's announcement means for individual immigrants and their families. Then those who have preregistered will have an opportunity for a one-on-one preliminary evaluation of their eligibility from people we are calling family defenders.

We are already scheduling follow-up events this month and into the new year, and we will be ready to accommodate the huge demand for accurate and trustworthy information.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel has been my consistent and outstanding partner in the effort, and we are both committed to making Chicago the model for the rest of the country; and for the advocates, the legal community, the business community, the public sector, we are all working together to make that a reality.

That is right. New York. Listen up, L.A. Get ready, Miami, Houston, and Dallas. We are going to work to protect as many families as we possibly can in the city of Chicago, and we are challenging you to keep up.

But it is not just the major immigrant gateway cities where we need to organize to protect American families. As the President showed us yesterday, cities in the South like Nashville are leading the way to integrate and assimilate immigrant populations. The spirit of inclusion is of utmost importance as we help families come forward, register with the government, submit their paperwork and fingerprints, and get ready and into the system.

I have told my House colleagues that I plan to be on the road a lot at the start of next year, traveling anywhere they need me to travel to help them conduct outreach and educate immigrant communities where they live. But it is not just the blue districts where we must support our immigrant communities and make sure they register. It will be necessary in red districts, too; States like South Carolina, Arizona, and Alabama, States that tried unsuccessfully to push their immigrant community farther underground. I will accept invitation from those States, too, to get the word out and educate the community in whatever way I can.

I can't tell you how many people have come up to me and said: Congressman, I don't know if this will help my family, my dad, my mom, my neighbor, or my parishioner, but I hope they will not still have to live in fear of deportation.

There are millions who will not be able to come forward and sign up because their cases cannot be reviewed under the President's guidelines. I tell them that what the President has announced is bold, it is broad, and it is extremely generous and helpful to the

United States and our immigrants who have no other way to get in the system and on the books; but it cannot go as far and it does not replace the need for congressional action and legislation.

But let us all remember that, by the end of this week, the clock is going to have run out on the best chance the House has had in decades to address immigration in a bipartisan and measured manner. The Senate did half the work by giving us more than a year to craft a bipartisan answer to their proposal, and we tried in many, many different ways to help this House rise to the occasion, to get out of the partisan ditch we have dug for ourselves and to put the country on a path to a safe, legal, orderly immigration system that protects the country and its people by welcoming its strivers and innovators from around the world.

In the end, the House was asleep at the switch and let the country down. But even as I work with people across the country to protect as many American families as possible, I pledge to my colleagues in both parties in the most sincere way possible, please work with us to solve the immigration issue so that we can move forward as a nation.

CELEBRATING LA SALLE HIGH SCHOOL LANCERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. CHABOT) for 5 minutes.

Mr. CHABOT. Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today a proud alumnus of Cincinnati's La Salle High School because, for the first time in the school's 54-year history, the Lancers have won the Ohio State football championship.

Last Friday evening the Lancers claimed the title with a 55-20 victory, breaking the record for most points ever scored in an Ohio Division II championship game.

La Salle's offense was so strong this season that in each of their five playoff games they averaged nearly 50 points. Leading the offense was junior running back Jeremy Larkin, who ran over 2,500 yards in just 15 games, scored 42 touchdowns, and is now a finalist for the coveted Ohio Mr. Football Award.

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All season long, La Salle competed with the best of the best, finishing with 14 wins and one nail-biting loss to the St. X Bombers, including victories over such powerhouses as Moeller, Elder, and Colerain High Schools.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, La Salle is my alma mater. I graduated in 1971 and played football all 4 years. I played on the defensive line. And in my senior year, we won seven games, lost one—coincidentally, to future Speaker JOHN BOEHNER's Moeller High School, where he played football too, although he had already graduated 3 years earlier—and we tied Elder 0-0 in the Pit and tied St. X's 18-18.

Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today a very proud alumnus of my high school.

I also want to mention that my brother Dave, who is 10 years younger than me, also played football at La Salle, and he was a defensive back there.

La Salle will always have a special place in my heart. I learned many of life's most important lessons in her halls and on the football field. As a matter of fact, my political career got my start at La Salle when I was first elected to student council there.

La Salle is a great school. I want to thank the coaches and the teachers and the staff and especially the parents who have made the sacrifices to pay the tuition there to make it possible for their sons to receive a tremendous education at La Salle.

Mr. Speaker, boxing legend Muhammad Ali once said "Champions aren't made in the gyms. Champions are made from something they have deep inside them—a desire, a dream, and a vision."

This season, the Lancers had the desire to make every practice count and play every game as if it were their last. They shared a dream that was strong enough to overcome the many distractions that high school kids often face in today's world, and their coaches gave them the vision that their hard work and sacrifice would pay off in the end.

Mr. Speaker, Lancers roll deep. This season illustrated that to the team, the school, and the community. Congratulations on a season well played and a job well done. Go, Lancers.

CONCLUDING MY SERVICE IN CONGRESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Pennsylvania (Ms. SCHWARTZ) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SCHWARTZ. Mr. Speaker, it has been my honor and privilege to serve in Congress for the past 10 years, representing the people of the 13th Congressional District of Pennsylvania.

As many of you know, my mother came to this country alone at the age of 16, a refugee of the Holocaust. America offered her safety, freedom, and opportunity. Her experience of fear and tragedy, resilience and hope inspired my commitment to public service, my love of our country, and all it can be.

As I conclude my congressional service, I want to thank my family and friends who believed in me and supported me, my constituents who trusted me, the civic and elected leaders, activists and advocates who gave voice to the wide array of concerns and causes, and to my talented staff, who enabled me to do all that we did.

I am proud of what we accomplished together, from the new parks and bike paths along the north Delaware River in northeast Philadelphia to the revitalization of main streets in towns across Montgomery County. We made our streets safer, promoted economic growth, and improved the lives of families across the Philadelphia region.